DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 142 283 PS 009 379

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TITLE Focus on Philosophies for Educating Young Children.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association (22nd, Miami Beach, Florida, May 2-6, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Reading; Behavior Change; *Child Development; Cognitive Development; *Developmental Stages; *Early Childhood Education; Humanistic Education; Individualized Reading; *Learning Theories; *Reading Programs
IDENTIFIERS Erikson (Erin H); Gesell (Arnold); *Piaget (Jean)

ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes four early childhood education philosophies (cognitive-interactionist, behaviorist, affective-interactionist, and developmental-maturationist). Each philosophy is briefly reviewed to provide understanding of its application to an appropriate curriculum model. A reading program congruent with each philosophy and model curriculum is suggested: (1) an individualized reading program reflects the cognitive-interactionist philosophy; (2) the Distar reading program or programmed reading as developed by Buchanan and Sullivan illustrates the behaviorist approach; (3) the language experience approach to teaching reading appears to be congruent with the affective-interactionist approach; and (4) a reading program using the basal reader seems consistent with the developmental-maturationist approach. (MS)

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FOCUS ON PHILOSOPHIES FOR EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN

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PS 009379

Paper presented at the Twenty-Second Annual Convention

International Reading Association

May 2-6, 1977

Miami Beach, Florida

FOCUS ON PHILOSOPHIES FOR EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN

Have you ever taken what you thought might be a perfect picture only to discover that the developed print was blurred? Perhaps the picture was blurred because you did not take the time to focus the lens. Perhaps you did not have enough knowledge of the camera so that you could focus the lens. Perhaps you needed some telescopic lens to do the job just right. You, teacher, are taking the pictures and if your pictures are clear chances are you know what you are doing and why. Let us try to focus, with telescopic lens, on four popular theories for educating young children so that we may better understand how and in what way children learn best.

It is the purpose of this paper to present four popular pictures of early childhood education philosophies -- Cognitive - Interactionist, Behaviorist, Affective - Interactionist, and Developmental - Maturationist. Each philosophy will be briefly reviewed to provide for understanding of its application to an appropriate curriculum model. A reading program congruent with each philosophy and model curriculum will also be presented. It is hoped that the reader will examine and evaluate his personal views of how children learn in light of the material presented.

When we focus on the Cognitive-Interactionist theoretical framework, the name of Jean Piaget is foremost in mind. Piaget's most comprehensive theory is that which is addressed to stages of intellectual development. The first stage, that of the sensori-motor, occurs between birth and two years of age. Basically, a child learns through the senses during this period and the exercises of reflexes are practiced. These include an ensemble of spontaneous movements, rhythms, innate reflexes to stimuli, and the beginnings of assimilation and accommodation. Habits are acquired via

circular reactions, and the distinction between means and goals develop into what are the beginnings of intelligence. The coordination between vision and prehension is made at this time. There follows the stage at which a child becomes capable of coordinating different schemes in order to adapt to new situations and, finally, the discovery of new means in order to adapt to new situations.

The second stage, the preoperational, takes place when the child is between 2 and 4 years of age. Thought processes develop through the ability to discover new symbols to use in communication with himself and others. Increasingly, through language, imitative behavior, and play the child utilizes mental images to represent objects not immediately perceived in the environment. His thinking, however, remains egocentric as he investigates his environment. He begins to think in terms of relationships and establishes his own view of cause and effect. Events are reasoned and judged by outward appearance regardless of objective logic, and he focuses on one aspect at a time in a task. He is learning, however, to apply past experiences to new events.

Between four and seven the child develops a widening social interest in the world. He learns to be less egocentric as he has to coordinate perspectives of other individuals. He increasingly acts in a consistent pattern of reasoning, but his comprehension of events is dominated by the inability to perceive more than one salient characteristic at a time. He develops more complex thinking skills, but his concept of class inclusions is based on perceptual differences rather than logical reasoning. He is also unable to consider a series of reversible operations.

The third stage, the concrete operational, normally occurs when a

child is between seven and eleven years of age. The child achieves a new level of thought in this stage, operational thought. This may be defined as the mental capacity to order and relate experience to an organized whole. He is able to understand reversibility, decentration, another's point of view, and classification. There is the development of the ability to utilize relational terms, to arrange objects on a quantitative dimension and the ability to utilize mental representation of a series of actions, which is not to be found in the preconceptual stage. Concrete operations presuppose that mental experimentation still depends on perception.

As the child approaches eleven years of age, she moves into the formal operational stage which continues on into adulthood. This period may be best characterized by the fact that the individual is not so dependent on concrete objects and that his thinking is more logical. The individual learns to think beyond the present and forms theories about everything, including the unknown. (Flavell, 1963; Maier, 1965; Ginsberg & Opper, 1969).

Essential to the understanding of Piagetian philosophy is that the child is an <u>active</u> learner who adapts to his environment. Adaptation, according to Piaget, occurs via two complementary and dynamic functions - the <u>assimilation</u> of and <u>accommodation to</u> aspects of the environment. The child assimilates that similar to what he already knows (assimilation). Often there is a contradiction between a factor in the environment and the child's concept of that factor, so he must adjust his old conception to better reflect the true situatior (accommodation). Piaget views intellectual growth as the resolving of the tension between assimilation and accommodation, and this is referred to as equilibrium (Piaget, 1963). An example of assimilation

and accommodation may be as follows. Let us suppose that because of some experience, a three-year old has acquired the concept of a book. Mother or father has shared Pat the Bunny, by Dorothy Kunhardt with the youngster. Let us further assume that this is the only book the child knows, and one which he has assimilated into his cognitive structure. Then one day, father introduces another book, The Best Word Book Ever by Richard Scarry. The youngster accommodates to the fact that there are other similar objects that fall into the class of those we label "books". As the child assimilated and accommodated to the Best Word Book Ever, there was some tension (i.e., the book was larger, the illustrations different, more objects were pictured, etc.) and with the resolution of that tension come equilibrium, which fostered intellectual growth.

All species, according to Piaget, adapt to the environment through assimilation of, accommodation to, and equilibration of these functions. Think back to a personal experience of today whereby you assimilated and accommodated and experienced equilibrium as you solved the tension between assimilation and accommodation.

The curriculum models most often associated with the Cognitive-Interactionist approach include Montessori, the Weikert Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, the Nimnicht Response Model and the British Primary/Open School Models (Stevens & King, 1976).

In terms of reading programs, it would appear that an Individualized Reading program would reflect this philosophy since there is a match by the child of the skill to the learning task within environmental structuring by the teacher.

The child's role within this theoretical framework is one of experi-

mentation, exploration and selection of books to be read. The teacher's role is to structure the environment in line with the child's interest and skill and he does so by supplying a variety of books to read, questions the child about his reading, extends the program with special skill groups, and redirects the child if the need arises.

Let us look through our telescopic lens once again, and focus on the Behavioristic theoretical framework. The most notable proponents of this theory include Skinner, Bereiter, and Engelmann who view the nature of the learning process as an observable, measurable change in behavior directly transmitted through teaching. Those of you who work with behavioral objectives can readily identify with this theory.

The Behaviorists are concerned with preacademic-academic skills and attitudes that are necessary for cultural competence and acceleration of the child's development. Those preschool programs that insist all children learn to read before first grade are most likely utilizing the stimulus response model. The preschooler who rushes home with glee having learned the sound of "d" as in dog is being programmed to think that reading is grapho-phonics, and he was probably taught so in a stimulus-response fashion.

The programs that support the stimulus-response model include the preacademic/academic Distar (Direct Instruction Systems for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading) and the Darcee (Demonstration and Research Center for Early Education) programs (Stevens & King, 1976).

In terms of reading materials within the Behavioristic mode, the reading program within Distar and Programmed Reading as developed by Buchanan and Sullivan illustrate the application of this concept to the teaching of reading.

The role of the child in the stimulus-response framework is that of respondent. The child operates on the environment in response to cues, and discriminative stimuli. The role of the teacher is to prescribe objectives and tasks for the child. He teaches directly, most of the time and selectively reinforces specific behavior. This teacher-centered philosophy has been reiterated by Engelmann who states: "The major difficulty with developmental explanations is that they are based on the assumption that children learn. The teaching assumption is that children are taught . . . Education is not designed to satisfy the individual needs of the child. . . the aim of the process is conformity. . . and there is no way to have education without conformity." (Aukerman, 1971)

Picture number three will be of the Affective - Interactionist theoretical framework. Adjusting the telescopic lens, we focus upon Erik Erikson's Stages in the Life Cycle of Man. Erikson is concerned with the psychosocial development that encompasses the learning of basic attitudes and values and ways of interacting with others. He believes that through effective ego functioning, the child employs reflective resolution of problems and difficulties in social constraints.

Erikson's philosophy is presented in his book Childhood and Society where he states, "Personality can be said to develop according to steps predetermined in the human organism's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening social radius, beginning with a dim image of a mother and ending with an image of mankind. . ." (Erikson, p. 270). Following are the steps he has identified in man's psychosocial development, and the special crises they bring. In presenting them, he has emphasized that while the struggle between the negatives and posi-

tives in each crises must be fought through successfully if the next developmental stage is to be reached, no victory is completely or forever won.

Stage one is Infancy: Trust vs. Mistrust. The first "task" of the infant is to develop "the cornerstone of a healthy personality," a basic sense of trust - in himself and his environment. This comes from a feeling of inner goodness derived from the "mutual regulation of his receptive capacities with the maternal techniques of provision" - a quality of care that transmits a sense of trustworthiness and meaning. The danger, most acute in the second half of the first year, is that discontinuities in care may increase a natural sense of loss, as the child gradually recognizes his separateness from his mother, to a basic sense of mistrust that may last through life.

Stage two is Early Childhood: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. With muscular maturation the child experiments with holding on and letting go and begins to attach enormous value to his autonomous will. The danger here is the development of a deep sense of shame and doubt if he is deprived of the opportunity to learn to develop his will as he learns his "duty," and therefore learns to expect defeat in any battle of wills with those who are bigger and stronger.

In the third stage we come to the Play Age: Initiative vs. Guilt. In this stage the child's imagination is greatly expanded because of his increased ability to move around freely and to communicate. It is an age of intrusive activity, avid curiosity, and consuming fantasies which lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety. It is also the stage of the establishment of conscience. If this tendency to feel guilt is "overburdened by all-

too-eager adults" the child may develop a deep seated conviction that he is essentially bad, with a resultant stifling of initiative or a conversion of his moralism to vindictiveness.

Stage four is School Age: Industry vs. Inferiority. The long period of sexual latency before puberty is the age when the child wants to learn how to do and make things with others. In learning to accept instruction and to win recognition by producing "things" he opens the way for the capacity of work enjoyment. The danger in this period is the development of a sense of inadequacy and inferiority in a child who does not receive recognition for his efforts (Erikson, 1963).

The remaining stages of Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood and Senescence will not be dealt with on this paper since early childhood is the issue at hand. The reader is referred to Childhood and Society for an explanation of those stages.

The curriculum models that reflect Erikson's theory are found in the Bank Street and Educational Development Center Models. Inherent in these models is the idea that there should be a match by the child of the skill to the learning task, within some structure provided by the teacher (Stevens & King, 1976).

Since the emphasis in Erikson's theory is related to assisting a child to develop and resolve personal-social problems, it is this writer's opinion that the Language Experience approach to teaching reading is congruent with this philosophy. The teacher who encourages the use of a solid language base and seeks to personalize reading via language experience activities is laying the ground work for positive affective skills and also providing for sound experiences in beginning reading.

The role of the child within the context of Erikson's theory would be that she is an active explorer in a self-directed activity. The teacher's role is one of observer who helps the child recognize problem situations, helps to resolve problems in socially appropriate ways and supports the child's development of mastery and autonomy. He also structures the environment to insure success.

The last picture to be taken is the one of the Developmental-Maturationist. Gesell, Ilg, and Ames are the theorists and researchers who have developed this theoretical framework. The theory proposed by these researchers is that the learning process should be non-oppressive which can be found in an enriched environment that is supportive of natural development and learning. The development of the whole child which includes the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development is the focus here. According to the Developmental-Maturationists, the child has genetic givens that determine how he will grow and develop. Gesell feels that maturation and acculturation interact in the development of behavior, but maturation is seen as the most fundamental influence. Maturation is so very fundamental that learning can never exceed maturation. The maturational laws of child development, for Gesell, establish patterns of behavior and growth which are reported in Gesell's Developmental Diagnosis charts (Mead, 1976). Curriculum models congruent with this philosophy include discovery and traditional schools and play schools (Stevens & King, 1976).

A reading program consistent with the Developmental-Maturationist viewpoint would most likely be the basal reader. To be sure, basal readers differ in their emphasis of scope and sequence, but these same charts suggest that developmentally we know what youngsters can and should be able

to handle in learning to read. We know that most of the children in our nation's elementary schools do develop reading skills in similar and predictable growth patterns (Smith & Johnson, 1976). This of course, is the rationale for preparing materials to meet the needs of the developmental readers in elementary schools today.

The role of the child in this theoretical framework is one who is to accomplish tasks that are consonant with what we know about child development and maturation. In some cases this is accomplished via self-directed activity. The teacher's role in this situation is one of observer, and one who structures the environment on the basis of what the Developmental-Maturationist theorists tell him about the physical/genetic growth of individuals.

Upon reviewing the Cognitive-Interactionist, Behaviorist, Affective-Interactionist, and Developmental-Maturationist philosophies, it is apparent that some overlap does exist between the theorists. However, closer examination reveals that the emphasis for viewing the child is clearly different for each philosophy, and, hopefully, the reader has examined and evaluated the theories in light of her personal views of how children learn. It is anticipated that as teachers seek to clarify and put into focus various theoretical frameworks, they do reflective thinking and what they do with and to a child is more meaningful, constructive, and effective. Regardless of the theoretical framework selected, the educated teacher looks to the child <u>first</u> and then decides on an appropriate reading program and curriculum model for that child.

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